

Tiny Grendel's Crowd Brings Van Zandt Down

By RICH AREGOOD

Townes Van Zandt has written some beautiful songs, not the least of which is "If I Needed You."

He deserves better than he got at his opening Thursday night at Grendel's Lair.

People with idle dreams about being performers should give a thought to what it's like playing to less than a couple dozen people in a room which seats over 200. Maybe Philadelphians don't go out weekday nights, but this is ridiculous.

VAN ZANDT'S set occasionally would falter. Guitar notes would be missed. Lyric lines would be forgotten. That small a crowd just doesn't react like a crowd.

Van Zandt's songs are good. Hell, he even looks the part of mildly disillusioned troubadour from the South—a smaller version of Jerry West, the basketball player.

Van Zandt got weaker as time went on. The sound of so few hands clapping together made me uneasy. Maybe it's imagination, but he seemed to develop that mildly panicked look comedians wear all the time.

But the house really does determine a performer's show. Ralph McTell, the English folkie, did some excellent Philadelphia shows for good houses. The rest of his tour,



TOWNES VAN ZANDT
... deserves better

according to his own people, was awfully like Van Zandt's Thursday night.

SO GO SEE HIM tonight or tomorrow. He's a good songwriter with a pleasant voice who deserves to have people to react to. Presumably, the management would also be pleased.

Also on the bill is Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jewboys' (Don't write me; Kinky named his band), a Texas Swing style band.

Mia Farrow, Andre Previn